

Hatcher Pass Management Plan

Recreational Focus Group Meeting Summary

Motorized and Non-Motorized Recreational Use Discussion

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Mining, Land, and Water (DMLW) and Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR), held a meeting on July 23rd with representatives of 16 recreational user groups from the Anchorage and MatSu Valley area to discuss recreational uses in the Hatcher Pass Management Plan (HPMP). This was the second meeting of this type, the first of which occurred on June 4 in Anchorage. A variety of recreational user groups were represented and included groups who favored motorized, non-motorized, and multiple use activities. The intent of this meeting was to discuss five areas of fairly intensive use winter recreation use in the Hatcher Pass that had been the focus of previous discussions and for which DNR had developed proposed recommendations for review. The five areas included: 16 Mile, Gold Mint and Archangel Corridors, Marmot Mountain, East-West Corridor (connects 16 Mile to the Craigie management unit), and Government Peak. If time allowed, the meeting was also intended to discuss the priority areas that each group felt particularly strongly about with the Hatcher Pass area.

Following a staff introduction that described the structure and purpose of the meeting, and the various maps that were available for review, the larger group was broken into two subgroups, which contained roughly equal numbers of motorized, non-motorized, and multiple use organizations. The subgroups were then asked to discuss the draft recommendations for the five areas and offer suggestions or comments about the initial recommendations. They could also offer their own ideas about how these areas should be managed.

Subgroup Comments

The following general comments, derived from both groups, were received on the five geographic areas. Differing approaches were identified, depending if the comment was from a non-motorized or motorized group representative, although some amount of consensus seemed also to emerge in some areas.

16 Mile

- General support for recommended closure of this area to motorized use.
- Some felt that they could support closure but that access would need to be provided. This access would come up through the Government Peak unit and destined at the Gold Mint parking lot or other locations along the road.
- This is an important area for those who use it (snowboarders, some skiers). Public safety concerns (conflict between motorized and non-motorized users) were expressed if an access corridor for motorized uses were to be provided.
- Corridor that hugged the road would be the best location since it would have the least interference.
- Proposed hydroelectric project may have an impact on an access corridor.
- Sledding area near mile 12 with run-outs to road is dangerous.
- An ATV trail can be put through the triangle without conflicts by using old remnant roads. Also, a proposal for an ATV trail from Gold Mint parking lot to Fishhook parking lot.

Government Peak

- There was general support for the recommended proposal (Group 1), which entails a continuation of the non-motorized designation except for a westerly area that would be opened to motorized use.
- Access corridors for motorized uses would be important for this unit. An access corridor running east-west in the southern part of the unit (within Borough land) and north-south (within Borough and state land) would be important. The North-South corridor could be built using the remnants of the Carle Wagon trail. It would leave the Edgerton Parks Road and ascend to the southwest ridge of Government Peak, travel north along a mid-mountain ridge to the MSB Alpine Ski area parking lot and then north to Fishhook Creek and then west to access the current corridor.
- The north-south corridor would link with the use areas in Archangel as well as other areas and would relieve pressure on the current parking areas, which are already heavily used. The east-west corridor would link with a regional system of trails.
- The north-south corridor must be designed to avoid current cross country and other non-motorized uses and should be located along or near the road. It must also avoid conflict with the Borough's Nordic ski system and the Alpine ski development that is being considered.
- The Shrock Road trailhead accesses trails to the west and could obviate the need for an east-west or north-south corridor. Travel from this trailhead (TH) would traverse Bald Mountain Ridge to the West Side possibly using the RS 2477 trail.
- The east-west corridor would be determined by the Borough planning process, now underway, and the Hatcher Pass management plan should not preclude the development of an access corridor on Borough land.
- Opposition to North-South corridor due to user conflicts and safety issues. This would put snow machine travel through the center of an important and heavily used backcountry ski/snowboard area without any natural boundaries to restrict snow machiners to the corridor.
- There was little to no support for an access corridor paralleling Fishhook Creek on its south side (Group 1) that would link up with the Fishhook parking lot and some support for it from Group 2.

Marmot Mountain

- The creation of a non-motorized area in this area is not enforceable and would be an exercise in futility.
- Disagree that the creation of a non-motorized area at this location would be unenforceable and not a sufficient reason for not closing this area. It should be closed to snow-machining. Very dangerous mix of snow-machiners and back-country skiers/snowboarders; someone is going to get killed there.
- Marmot Mountain should be closed due to safety issues and another 'play area' developed near the Gold Mint parking lot. Marmot Mountain provides excellent skiing and would be an acceptable concession on the part of the snow-machine community if an alternate area is provided.
- Important to retain corridor for snow machines (to access the West Side) and should be able to use the upslope area for snow-machining.
- Suggestion that volunteers from clubs be used by Parks to put up and take down signs and barrier fences each year.

Archangel/Reed Lakes

- Principal skiing area along slopes on Marmot Mountain, including the south and east sides; should consider the extension of the non-motorized area to include these areas as well. Contiguous closed areas are desirable since they enable the experience of quiet and the sense of being separation from motorized users. The creation of a non-motorized area here is especially important because of concerns over possible injury or death.
- Support for the separation of users with the Reed Creek drainage the favored 'play area' for the snow-machine community. It is difficult to reach the West Side to get access to Kashwitna. East Side access is desired since the current route to access the East Side requires travel through technical and dangerous terrain.
- Archangel unit offers suitable terrain for beginners and intermediate snow-machiners.
- The area east of Archangel Road should be developed as a snow machine area for less advanced snowmachiners (low and intermediate levels). It would extend from the Gold Mint parking lot up valley to, roughly, the location of the unimproved parking lot that accesses into the Reed Lakes and Archangel Valley. Archangel Road would be reserved for skiers and the areas upslope of the road (Marmot Mountain) would be designated a non-motorized area. Areas down slope from the road would be open to winter motorized use.
- Nordic skiers use the Archangel Road until satisfactory snow depth is reached for snow machine use (about January 1); thereafter, it is too dangerous to use road and they go elsewhere.
- Develop a separate, parallel trail for snow-machine use with Archangel Road being used by skiers.
- Allow the use of Archangel Road for Nordic skiers until January 1st; this becomes less important once the Nordic skiing area that the Borough is developing is in place.
- Develop a time share concept with one group having the area one week and the other group having it alternating weeks.
- Support for and opposition to time share concept.
- It is important that the high peaks area remain non-motorized. These areas have been used historically for rock and mountain climbing. The hut leases in these areas are based on the concept of a quiet, non-motorized area. Motorized corridors through this area are unacceptable. Larger buffers delineated by ridge tops are desired (as non-motorized areas).

East West Corridor

- General support for concept. It is, essentially, what occurs now and is necessary to provide access from the parking lots to the Willow/Craigie area.
- The existing corridors works and should be maintained.
- Corridors that provide access are essential to the snow-machine community as are adequate restroom facilities and plowed parking lots.

Upcoming Process

Staff indicated that the comments for the night's meeting would be summarized and put on the DNR website for the Hatcher Pass Management Plan. (This is that document). Staff also indicated that DMLW and DPOR would have to discuss how exactly to proceed, but that the general sense at this time is that there would be two general meetings, with one in the Valley and one in Anchorage, that would present DNR proposals and possible options for non-motorized/motorized areas. This would occur sometime in August or September. A request was made for the meetings to take place in October.